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ABSTRACT

Many colleges and universities use "adjunct faculty" as a means to address increasingly unpredictable student populations, questionable funding formulas, and tightened education budgets. Initial evidence suggests, however, that the practice of using them contains flaws. This research was conducted to determine existing circumstances of adjunct faculty members' preparation and integration into the educational administration department of a Midwestern regional university and, using resulting data, design an adjunct faculty integration model that would strengthen the educational administration program for faculty and students. Survey responses from 20 adjunct professors were used to generate qualitative and quantitative data that were analyzed statistically. Findings indicate that the majority of adjunct professors feel a vested interest in strong, practical training programs for building- and district-level leadership. Communication between adjunct and department professors, however, is commonly minimal. Adjunct faculty members are not always given information to help students understand university or program protocol, to maintain consistency in program structure, or to present ways of demonstrating competencies in student performance. Strengthening collaboration between department and adjunct professors can enhance faculty integration, and improving communication can increase and enhance the exchange of ideas and information. These two elements will form the basis of an adjunct faculty integration model. (Contains 12 references.) (RT)

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Out of Sight – Out of Mind: The Importance of Integrating Adjunct Faculty into an Educational Administration Department

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Out of Sight – Out of Mind

The Importance of Integrating Adjunct Faculty Into an Educational Administration Department

Introduction

Attempting to address increasingly unpredictable student populations, questionable funding formulas, and tightened education budgets, across the national many colleges and universities have increased the use of the nonpermanent, or per course, faculty members. Based upon anecdotal data of students, colleagues, part-time professors, and the researchers, questions have been raised regarding effective implementation of 'adjunct faculty'. The initial evidence seemed to suggest that the 'adjunct faculty' concept was somewhat flawed in its label. Rather than 'adjunct faculty' as a title, the label should have read 'adjunct' meaning 'extra' – not really a part of, but used to fill-in when needed. The incidents encountered by many of the practitioner-professors were truly the 'out-of-sight – out-of-mind' experience. It seemed that after being notified that they would be teaching for the department or program, they were often then 'left on their own' with little or no additional information or contact. Furthermore, incidents of students who had not received or were not aware of procedural issues and specific information often related the views that the "professor did not provide that information". Upon further investigation, the student had typically taken the course/courses 'off-campus' and had instruction from a part-time instructor, or 'adjunct faculty member'. This was not to say the practitioner-professors were at fault; rather, it emphasized the concern that both the adjunct faculty and students were not receiving adequate information nor

complete information. Based on these experiences, initial review of the literature, and informal interviews, the determination of need for further research was confirmed.

Summary Review of the Literature

Initial review of the literature identified several areas of possible investigation on the topic of the adjunct professorship. Statistical evidence suggested that the use of the "practitioner-professor" might be as high as 65% in some institutions and/or programs. Concurrent with the significantly increased practice of employing practitioners as "adjunct faculty", program continuity and coherence have become increasingly important. This is emphasized by students' dependence upon the practitioner-faculty members for contemporary knowledge from the career field as well as for pertinent information dissemination regarding university, departmental, and programmatic protocols. These demands were emphasized as many state and national accreditation processes have increased the demand for and use of performance-based assessment measures requiring extensive preparation.

The situation in which the practitioner-professor often found him/herself can be summarized in a statement by Tuckerman and Pickerill (1988) which referenced the academic part-timer as generally having only *marginal status* with permanent faculty and programs, while having *full status and expectation* with students. Issues affecting adjunct faculty members ranged from lack of office space, provision of materials and/or supplies, participation in planning or governance issues, as well as the lack of physical proximity to the formal departmental structure (Rhoades, 1996). Student demands of the practitioner-professor, however, were similar to that of the traditional faculty member with the expectation that the instructor (adjunct or full-time) would have accurate information regarding departmental and university protocol, expectations, and certification

processes. The practical knowledge base required to competently 'do the job' must be integrated with the theoretical knowledge base upon which the students will often be assessed.

Adjunct faculty members are often employed with little or no lead time for course preparation. This obviously creates a less than optimum situation for achieving appropriate interaction with colleagues regarding curriculum, current changes in program, etc. Part-time faculty have often been referenced as 'itinerant laborers' who move on when enrollment declines or are called in when enrollment increases unexpectedly. This disconnectedness, inherent in the part-time position, produces its own set of problems as referenced previously. The employment practices of hiring practitioners with terminal degrees is often challenging, especially for the modicum of salary ranging from $900 to $2500 per course offered to most adjunct faculty members (Avakian, 1995). Likewise, part-time faculty members are typically hired with little or no input from departmental faculty which generates concern over program deterioration and lack of involvement in the establishment of academic standards (Centra, 1979; Mayhew, Ford, & Hubbard, 1990; Rhoades, 1996).

Additional barriers affecting adjunct professors were noted as time and distance. The logistics of full-time employment, geographical location, and psychological separation, would affect the interaction of part-time faculty with the supporting institution/program (Huffman, 1997). According to Huffman (1997) the perception was that students receiving instruction in the off-campus format were not always covering the same course objectives typically delivered in on-campus courses. These students were in danger, therefore, of being unable to respond effectively on comprehensive examinations as well as certification assessments noted previously. This is particularly important in states which have accepted as their licensure tool

the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (formally known as the ISSLC examination). This certification tool emphasizes problem-based evaluation in a performance arena. To further substantiate the premise that quality education is best served in programs characterized by continuity and coherence, statements emanating from the Conference on the Growing Use of Part-time and Adjunct Faculty (1997) suggested that traditional faculty "keep abreast of developments in their field by reading current literature, talking with colleagues, and participating in professional conferences" (p. 3). Obviously, the practitioner-professor does likewise, but the activities will differ as the traditional faculty member is totally focused on the training program while the part-time professor has additional duties and responsibilities which will, of course, deviate from just the formal training program.

Burger (1999) emphasized the urgent need for university and practitioner alignment to address the deepening shortage of school leaders. There is little doubt (Burger, 1999) that the integration of practical knowledge tied to theoretical constructs builds a much stronger program for the transitioning demands of educational leadership. The need for, and appreciation of, adjunct faculty members is not in doubt. Rather, the consistent awareness of their needs, their integration into departmental activities and the total program are typically not being implemented. Indeed, it does not appear that need for remedy of these issues has even been clearly identified nor addressed. To achieve this goal, the formal research procedure of review, analysis, revision, and implementation will be necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the investigation attempted to determine existing circumstances of adjunct faculty members' preparation and integration into the

Educational Administration Department of a Midwestern regional university. Second, the resulting data was used to design an Adjunct Faculty Integration model that would strengthen the total Educational Administration program for both faculty and students. Implications from this study are then anticipated to build further implementing a University-Practitioner Model for part-time and full-time faculty partnerships and internship programs.

Investigation Methodology

Investigation Design

Using a mixed design investigation, the study was conducted in two phases. The first piece of the investigation was used as the primary qualitative phase which served as the foundation piece for instrument development. The second phase was developed from the qualitative information and designed to provide the quantitative portion of the investigation. Based on preliminary research questions derived from the review of literature, a structured interview protocol was developed. Random selection of six adjunct professors with equal distribution of genders was completed, and personal interviews were conducted. The second phase of the study utilized an on-line survey which was disseminated via e-mail and the University Blackboard format.

Data Analyses

Data analysis involved both qualitative and quantitative summaries as noted in the *Conclusions and Implications* section of the paper. Findings were reported using frequencies, percentages, and rank ordering with anecdotal results of particular interest noted.

Participants

Participants included twenty-seven adjunct faculty affiliated, past or present, with the department on or after the 1995 academic year. All adjunct faculty hold terminal degrees and are or have been practicing school leaders at the building or district level.

Data Collection

Data was collected during the spring and summer semesters, 2001. Multiple data sources were used with triangulation of the data specifically related to personal interviews and surveys. Research tools integrated scaled and non-scaled response items. These included eight open-ended response items and nine specific response items. Interviews were conducted with selected participants, taped recordings of the interview proceedings were transcribed with patterns and trends noted.

A total of twenty-seven adjunct professors were invited to participate in the investigation. Responses from twenty respondents provided a seventy-four percent (74%) return rate on the first participation request.

Findings

Chronback-alpha Reliability coefficients were derived using two subscales in the general areas of *Orientation* and *Lack of Difficulties* experienced as reported by the adjunct faculty respondents. In the area of *Orientation* to the program, department and University, that analysis indicated a coefficient rating of .8765. The *Lack of Difficulties* analysis referenced issues such as the teaching assignment, facilities, and materials. This coefficient rating was resulted at .7327. Completed analyses of the complete survey data were reported using frequencies, percentages, and rank ordering.

General demographic data referenced initial involvement within the adjunct field, job expectations, and assignments. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the respondents indicated that they were contacted by the department head or department members as the means by which they became involved in part-time teaching at the University level. The purposes/reasons for becoming an adjunct professor are indicated in Table One below.

Table One

Motivation for Teaching as Adjunct Professor
Presented in Rank Order by Mean Response

Item	***Mean Response***	***N***
Help build future leaders	1.80	20
Pass on experiential knowledge	3.25	20
Grow as a school administrator	4.31	16
Work with adult learners	4.47	19
Intellectual stimulation	4.68	19
Avenue for full-time employment	5.00	17
Prospect for possible employees	5.94	17
Social/professional connection with full-time faculty	7.24	17
Social/professional connection with students	7.24	7.24

The educational administration department typically provides off-campus instruction at two distance sites. The geographical location of the practitioner-professors were, however, generally an on-campus assignment. Eighty percent (80%) of the part-time professors taught

on-campus with twenty-five percent (25%) and thirty-five percent (35%) teaching at off-campus sites. The indicator 'other' was provided to encompass distance learning technologies as a descriptor. Courses taught by adjunct professors encompass the entire program offerings and range in number from one to more than five courses. Thirty-five percent of the respondents have taught at least one course, thirty-five percent at least two, ten percent three courses, ten percent four courses, and ten percent more than five courses in their tenure as part-time professors. The number of years of involvement with the department ranged from one to more than five with eighty percent of the respondents having taught three years or less. None of the adjuncts had taught four or five years, and twenty percent of the respondents had worked with the department for more than five years.

Notations of areas of concern and/or difficulty with the teaching assignment were identified as strands and patterns in the initial interview process and then listed in the on-line survey. The results of these measures are noted in Table Two

Table Two

Areas of Possible Concern/Difficulty

	Descriptor	***Strongly Disagree***	***Disagree***	***No Opinion***	***Agree***	***Strongly Agree***
1.	Rarely had problems with room assignments	.05	.10	.00	.45	.40
2.	Rarely had problems with paychecks (receiving/inaccurate, etc.)	.00	.11	.00	.37	.52
3.	Received regular communication with department/faculty	.05	.10	.25	.40	.20
4.	Received adequate orientation to university and/or department	..05	.11	.37	.37	.11

5.	Job-related expectations were clearly defined	.00	.10	.05	.65	.20
6.	Received regular communication (Mailbox, memos, e-mail, etc.)	.00	.20	.50	.15	.15
7.	Rarely had problems with student enrollment (rosters, grade requirements/reporting, etc.	.00	.00	.10	.60	.30
8.	Received adequate/fair salary	.10	.35	.20	.35	.00
9.	Had sufficient time for preparation after teaching assignment was made	.00	.05	.00	.70	.25
10.	Problems with parking	.20	.10	.05	.35	.30
11.	Minimal additional expenses related to teaching assignment	.00	.15	.05	.65	.15
12.	Rare problems with textbook orders/supplies	.05	.10	.15	.45	.25
13.	Felt adequately prepared with regard to comprehensive exam preparation	.00	.00	.00	.65	.35
14.	Felt adequately prepared to train students for portfolio preparation	.00	.05	.11	.63	.21

** *Percentages may not total 100.*

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions of Study

Based on analyses of the data, the majority of adjunct professors responding to this investigation indicated a strong intrinsic motivation to teach at the graduate level, the opportunity to 'help build future leaders'. Following in rank position numbers two and three are motivators further indicating the concern and value respondents placed on training future school administrators referencing passing on their 'personal knowledge gained from experience' and 'growing as a better leader themselves'. These results lead to the first

conclusion. It would appear that practicing educators feel a strong vested interest in strong, practical training programs for building and district level leadership. Since this is the identical concern of university graduate programs, there would appear to be an immediate opportunity for effective interactions, partnerships, and collaboratives between practitioners and university personnel.

The second conclusion drawn from this research reflects the issues of communication between the department and the part-time professors. As noted in Table Two, descriptors three, four, and six indicated a mixed view of the comfort zone of the part-time professors. Each of these descriptors, both in the interview transcripts and the printed survey suggested a minimal communication bond between the full-time departmental faculty and the practitioner professors. While the percentages were not strongly slanted, the distribution leaves approximately half of the respondents feeling less than comfortable in these areas.

Conclusion number three is directly related to the issues noted previously regarding provision of information to students, consistency in programmatic structure, and demonstrated competencies in student performance. Departmental mandates of a graduate portfolio and comprehensive examinations may present unique challenges for practitioner-professors. While descriptor numbers thirteen and fourteen suggested that the practitioner-professors felt comfortable with their preparation of students' for departmental expectations, anecdotal evidences from the full-time faculty do not equate with this view. This possible discrepancy necessitates further review of the issue.

Implications for Further Investigation

The implications of this study break into two primary areas. First, collaboration between practitioners and professors strengthen the traditional educational administration program. The area in need of further study, therefore, would be to integrate the two elements effectively -- retaining assessment preparation practices while constantly revising the curriculum to address current practice. Second, while the practitioner-professors felt that they were prepared and effectively implementing curriculae, improved communication is vital. It will be the responsibility of the formal university program to increase and enhance the exchange of ideas and information.

Addressing these two areas will assist in the development of an Adjunct Faculty Integration model. Building upon the strengths of both pieces, the adjunct professorship and traditional professorship, will strengthen the total Educational Administration program thereby enhancing professional preparation for future school leaders.

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